2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



tion, General W. T. Sherman issued his famous Field Order No. 15: "The islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. Johns river, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the Negroes."[22]

From the earliest days the islanders tended to be self-sufficient agriculturally. The landowners—black or white—harvested mainly indigo and long-staple cotton, commodities that thrived well on the rich island soil. Rice, by 1724 one of the most profitable staple commodities in the mainland coastal areas,[23] was not grown to any great extent on the islands.[24]

Peter Wood writes convincingly that the West Africans were primarily responsible for the economic success of the flourishing rice crops in the Carolina territory. The cultivation, growth, and processing of rice is an old tradition in West Africa. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rice was grown in most West African areas, and especially heavily near the Gambia River. In the Congo-Angola region, a white explorer once noted that rice was so plentiful that it brought no price at all. During this period West Africans actually sold rice to the slave traders to stock their ships.[25]

Unlike the Europeans, then, who knew little about rice, the transplanted Africans were widely familiar with its cultivation. In fact, rice was so important a part of African culture that its growth and harvest were celebrated each year, just as the growing of yams was celebrated in "yam festivals."[26] In West Africa today there is still a kind of symbolism associated with rice and yams: they are much more than just food to be consumed.[27] Rice continues to be a primary food in both West Africa and the Sea Islands, and its preparation and offering tend to be expressions of fine taste and "good eating."[28]

Until recent years the primary Sea Island commodity was long-staple cotton, a crop that thrives only in light, sandy, saltwater lands. Because of its fine silky texture, it brought excellent prices on the world market, and it was grown along the Atlantic coast from the Santee River of South Carolina to the Florida Everglades.[29] The rapid expansion of cotton production on the islands, as elsewhere, was a major factor in the great demand for West African slaves to work the fields. Perhaps because cotton was a crop new to the slaves, or because the growth and harvest of an inedible crop did not offer the familiar gratification associated with rice, or merely because of the connection

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



with slavery, the mention of cotton in Sea Island folklore and literature generally has negative connotations.

Today neither cotton nor rice is grown to any extent on or around the Sea Islands. Rice was gradually eliminated by the many disastrous floods and storms which frequent the Carolina coast. Cotton was abandoned in favor of more lucrative means of support, especially since the cotton-picking machine eliminated the need for harvesting of cotton by hand. The primary crops now are edible produce, including soybeans, peas, okra, tomatoes, corn, peanuts, and watermelons, and many folk narratives focus on the planting, cultivation, and harvesting of these crops.

Another major food source is fish, shrimp, crabs, oysters, mussels, clams, lobsters, conchs, and sharks, all of which the islanders prepare expertly and variously. Fish has always been important in the local diet. Consider, for example, a resident minister's account of the varieties available around Edisto Island in 1800:

> The creeks, rivers, and seas which indent and surround the island furnish at different and appropriate seasons of the year, a great variety of excellent fish—as the larger drum, the small black drum, bass, rock-fish, sheephead, cavallie, bonnetta, salmon-trout, yellowtail, ale-wife, croaker, plaice, flounder, skate, pike, shad, and catfish, and many others, suitable for the table. Porpoise and sharks frequent the creeks and surrounding waters. Some of the latter are seen and caught of an enormous size. They are considered as just objects of terror by the negroes. And yet, although the fishermen continue hours together waist deep in water, and have often the misfortune of hooking them, they escape with impunity.[30]

Crabbing and fishing are so much a part of Sea Island culture that many children learn the fine art of casting and netting as early as three years old. Some residents who earn their livings from fishing practice an old African method of netting fish in mass. An elderly gentleman explained to me that his grandfather had taught him to beat on the sides of his boat to attract fish and porpoises to the area (see Appendix 1).[A] The porpoises scare schools of fish ahead of them, and the fish are then caught in the nets. In a variant of this method, a group of fishermen will wade out into the water to beat on their drums or other instruments. The more noise they create above and below water, the more

A. [For Appendix 1, see Category 226, pp. 151-155--Analyst]

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

# *Prologue*

The coastal region of the South Carolina Lowcountry, bounded on the north by Georgetown and on the south by Port Royal and St. Helena Sound, was the land of the Gullah slave population. Bordering on these coastal lowlands, stretching out into the arms of the sea, halfway between Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia are a fringe of fertile islands. The largest of these islands are Port Royal, Paris, Ladies, Hilton Head, and St. Helena.[1] Here indigo and the once famous long staple cotton were cultivated by the most isolated Gullah slaves, who also created and maintained a distinct, imaginative, and original African-American culture. Because their isolation precluded direct exposure to mass Euro-American influences, Sea Island Gullahs offer evidence of significant combinations of traditional retentions, American acculturation, and intergroup socialization.

The name "Gullah" is generally believed to be a shortened form of Angola. Africans from the Kongo-Angola region, Bantu-speaking peoples, were imported in large numbers during Carolina's early colonial history.[2] As early as 1742, the *South Carolina Gazette* advertised for a runaway slave called "Golla Harry." One of Denmark Vesey's coconspirators, "Gullah Jack," was reportedly born in Angola. An entry of the Charleston City Council for 1822 refers to "Gullah Jack" and his "Gullah or Angola Negroes." The Vesey trial record, however, simply refers to Jack as an African. Winifred Vass, in *The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States*, points out that the ruler of the Mbundu nation in Central Africa was called the Ngola, from which the Portuguese named the colony. Vass suggests that this name was used by Europeans to refer to

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 17]

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



175 never get to heaven. Gullah soldiers sang a song about the black driver
567 during the Civil War. White witnesses thought the song appeared "quite
(533) secular in its character, yet its author called it a 'spiritual' ":
(539)

> Fust ting my mammy tell me,
> O' gwine away!
> Tell me bout de nigger-driver,
> O' gwine away!
> Nigger-driver second debil. . . .

The relationship between the missionary's observation and the "spiritual" further illustrates how Gullahs viewed slave drivers. One driver, "noted as a good Negro, and a Methodist," had heard since his childhood that no driver could ever get to heaven, "and they need not try, for none . . . could see God's face in peace." The distraught man told a Methodist missionary, " 'to that tree every night I want to pray; at last God, for Christ sake, pardoned my sins.' " The black driver became fully convinced that " 'Christ is able to save a driver as well as anybody else.' " And he hoped, said the missionary, to hold out faithfully so that " 'people will see at least one driver in heaven.' "[39]

175 The type of bondage experienced by the Gullahs was related to the Lowcountry's settlement as well as the staple crops produced. The colony of Carolina was settled by West Indian planters who created a system of slavery notorious for maltreatment of black laborers. One individual, a German, traveling through the Carolina Lowcountry after the American Revolution, observed that:

> The condition of the Carolina negro slaves is in general harder and more troubulous . . . wretched food, more work, tedious work, harsh and cynical treatment at the hands of owners and overseers. There is less concern here as to their moral betterment . . . proof is in the fact that they do not multiply . . . numbers are refreshed thru importations.[40]

175 The continued harshness of the system was maintained. After indigo
567 cultivation, both South Carolina and Georgia became absorbed in cotton
• 248 culture. Although not as backbreaking as indigo, Sea Island cotton extracted a heavy toll from black workers in many ways. The staple needed
461 a tremendous amount of labor and laborers, especially after 1820 when the international market value of fine cotton soared. On an average plantation, fifty to sixty days of labor per slave were required to produce one bale of fine Sea Island cotton. The crop required more hoeing than short-

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



staple cotton, a different type of picking, which had to be done from only slightly opened bolls, and a painstaking preparation for the staple market in the ginning process. Men were usually responsible for seed extraction of Sea Island cotton. Jenkins Mikell of the Peters Point Plantation, Edisto Island, gave an account of this activity on his father's estate:

> The operation was long, tedious and fatiguing. It was done on gins operated by foot, a crude plantation, or domestic device for getting out the seed from the lint—one man to a gin. He would stand on his left leg and work a crank-like arrangement, somewhat like a crank that drives a sewing machine, first with his right foot, then when he got tired . . . he would hop on his right foot and work his gin with his left foot—never stopping his gin as he changed. . . . As each man has thirty pounds of lint cotton to gin out for his day's work, he has no time to loaf.[41]

Sea Island slave women also performed arduous, monotonous, and fatiguing work on the plantations. The crop was harvested from late September through December, a cold, damp part of the year on the coast. Women and boys were considered the best pickers, though all field hands would be ordered out at first harvest. As soon as enough cotton was gathered, ginning began which took many men away from the fields. Women pickers worked rapidly yet carefully, so not to bruise the delicate fibers for this would affect the grade. Sea Island planter William Elliott maintained that "the greatest care is used by them to separate from the cotton, all dried leaves or other substances that may impair or discolour." While "prime, young and strong" women engaged in this activity, the elderly, "less sturdy" women and those near their time of childbirth worked in the gin house. They thrashed or "whipped" seed cotton to further remove loose sand or dirt then passed it on to "assorters." This group of women stood before long tables and divided the lint according to color and fineness. From there men received the "assorted" seed cotton for seed extraction. Once this was accomplished, women "moters" inspected and divided the cotton once again, removing fibers stained by the black cotton seed crushed by the gin. Finally, before packing, the cotton was subjected to one final inspection at the "mote table."[42]

The whole process created a tenseness which everyone experienced. A driving momentum was kept up, but quality work was insisted upon since that was the key to the lint's value. Activities were coordinated so

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



that cotton did not lie around or be stored after picking since too much exposure injured the product. Some overseers worked the slaves at night and on Sundays. The rawness and wetness of the weather did not deter managers and planters from ordering all "available" hands out to the fields. Though work in the gin house was considered "light" work, this "cotton barn" offered little relief from cold and dampness. The air inside was so unhealthy that slaves preferred the openness of the fields. Workers breathed flying lint and dust during the long hours as they labored in standing positions.[43]

The labor had a telling effect on the slave women's physical health. A callous attitude developed toward needs of pregnant women, postpartum illnesses, infant care, exhaustion and exposure to inclement weather. Bondswoman Susannah, in relating to Laura Towne, the tragedy of having all three of her living sons sold away, mentioned that she had actually had twenty-two pregnancies. Another defiant Gullah woman who worked in the house was beaten frequently by order of the mistress and retaliated by bringing "not one nigger" to Maussa. Another woman was buried up to her neck in earth as punishment, a few days after she had given birth to a stillborn child. Laura Towne, who saw signs of illtreatment, recorded various accounts:

> On this place, the Oaks, Loretta showed me her back, arms and breasts today. In many places there were ridges as high and long as my little finger and everywhere marks of the whip. She said that her children had been killed in her by whipping. She says it was because when "heavy with child," she could not do the full task of a field hand. I suspect also being rather apt to resist and rather smart in speaking her mind, poor thing. She has suffered terribly and it is no wonder that she is more indifferent about her clothes and house. . . . She says this was "de cruelest place."

Loretta lived on the plantation of Daniel Pope, a member of the Sea Island Baptist "aristocracy" who "gave no shoes, salt, molasses, nor Sunday clothes . . . neither would he allow the field hands any meat, nor permit them to raise pigs." In the year before the Civil War Pope determined to make the people work as much as possible, "so he kept them in the field from morning till night and lashed them every day."[44]

Francis Kemble noted on her visit to the Georgia Sea Islands that the principal hardships fell to the lot of the women. She wrote of her first visit to the "Infirmary":

> Women lay prostrate on the floor, without bed, mattress or pillow, buried in tattered and filthy blankets. . . . I stood in the midst of them, perfectly unable

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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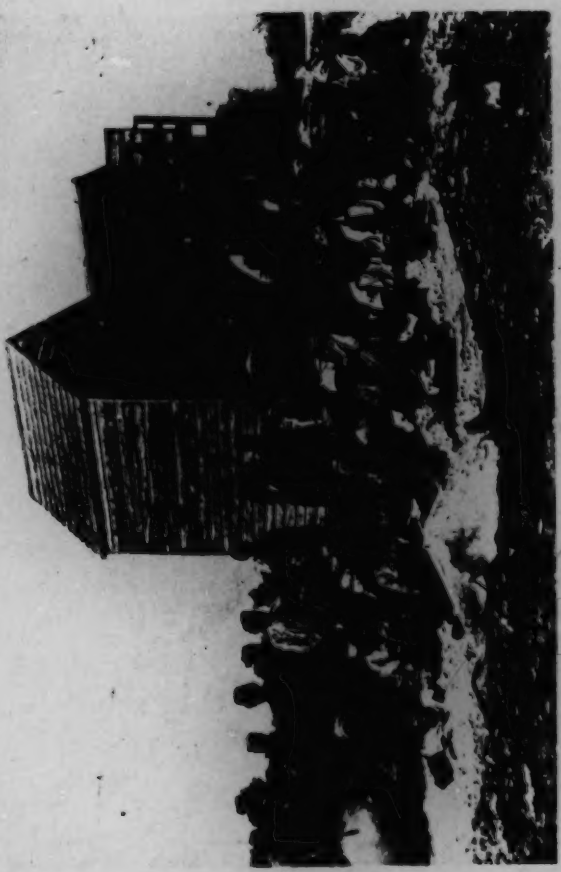

*Gullahs and Sea Island Cotton. (Personal collection.)*

[p. 256]

3; Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



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*American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1983), 118–20. See also Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 371–74, 386–88.

39. Towne Diary, 10; Edward Philbrick to Dr. L. B. Russell, June 15, 1863, Edward Atkinson Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (New York: Collier Books, 1962, repr. from 1870 ed.), 210–211; *SCA*, August 11, 1843.

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40. Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1769 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974); Johann Schöepf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783–84*, trans. Alfred Morrison (Philadelphia: W. J. Campbell, 1911), 220–21.

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41. Lucius Gaston Moffatt and Joseph Médard Carrière, "A Frenchman Visits Charleston, 1817," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 49, no. 2 (April, 1948): 141; Johnson, *Social History*, 22–29; Mikell, *Chariot Wheels*, 19–20; R. F. W. Allston, "Sea Coast Crops of the South," *Debow's Review*, XVI (January–June, 1854): 596–98; William Elliot, "On Cultivation of Sea Island Cotton," *Southern Agriculturalist* I (April, 1828): 154; Rosengarten, *Tombee*, 70, 72; Crum, *Gullah*, 233–34, U. B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966, repr. from 1918 ed.), 153–54, 223–25. Philip Morgan takes a different view. He argues that Sea Island cotton cultivation resulted in less arduous slave labor and that the task system augmented black independence and autonomy. See his "Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country," *Journal of Southern History*, no. 3 (August, 1983): 399–405, and "Black Society in the Low Country," 106–7, 120–21.

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42. Mikell, *Chariot Wheels*, 19–20; Allston, "Sea Coast Crops of the South," 596–98; Fripp Diary, passim; J. A. Turner, ed., *The Cotton Planter's Manual* (New York: Negro Universities Press, repr. from 1867 ed.) 135–36; Elliott, "Sea Island Cotton," 154; Thomas Lagare, "Preparation of Sea Island Cotton," *Southern Agriculturalist* II, ser. 2 (December, 1842): 626–27; R. King to P. Butler, October 31, 1824, December 5, 1824, box 33, folder 1, and March 1, 1835, box 33, fol. 5, Wistar Papers, Butler Section, HSP; Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, "A Memoir on the Origin, Cultivation and Uses of Cotton," *Proceedings of the Agricultural Convention and State Agricultural Society of South Carolina* (Charleston: Miller & Browne, 1844), 30; Diary of William F. Allen, 82–83 in William F. Allen Family Papers, 1775–1937, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison; Rosengarten, *Tombee*, 71–73.

43. Fripp Diary, passim; Towne Diary, 10, 20, 24, 32–33; R. King to P. Butler, Oct. 19, 24, and 31, 1824, box 33, fol. 1, Wistar Papers, Butler Section, HSP; Kemble, *Journal*, 174–75, 182–83, 189–92, 226–27, 233, 251, 263–64; King, Jr., "Management of Butler Estate," 3–4; Seabrook, "Memoir on Cotton," 30–31; Johnson, *Social History*; Elizabeth Ware Pearson, *Letters From Port Royal* (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, repr., 1969, repr. from 1906 ed.), 13, 31, 114; Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*; The Port Royal Experiment (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 126–27.

44. Allen Diary, 136, 91; Towne Diary, 33.

45. Kemble, *Journal*, 120–21, 182–83, 189–205, 214, 226–27, 233, 263.

46. Ibid., 135–36, 79–80.

47. Coffin Point Records Overseer report for 1818, SCHS; Fripp Diary, passim; Crum, *Gullah*, 244–45; Wightman, *Life of Capers*, 291; Pinckney, *Address*, 23–24 (Appendix); Johnson, *Social History*, 28–29, 106; W. E. B. DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969; repr. from 1896 ed.), 180–86; James H. Cuthbert, *Life of Richard Fuller* (New York: Sheldon Co., 1878), 198; Federal Writers Program, Georgia, *Drums and Shadows* (Westport, Conn.:

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

159 was a little bit lazy, that kind of thing. But my father was very smart in carpentry. He built a house in a few days if you just give him the material. But then as he got older he turned more to farming.

159 My father was a man believe in whatever the white folks said. He didn't
197 want to hurt them a bit. I know after I start farming with him, one day we
803 went to carry some cotton to sell. The white man who figured what the cotton come to, he gave us a certain price. I started to figure mine.

Daddy told me, "Don't do that. The white folks never like that, Son."

I say, "Well, I'm not figuring for the white folks at this point, I'm figuring for my own benefit."

Well, he never figured, but I figured mine. Unfortunately, mine was wrong when the white man figured, but I wouldn't take it. I waited until everybody got the money, including my daddy, and I went to him. "According to what you paid me, my money didn't come to what it should come to for the amount of cotton I had."

So he said, "Well, let me see." Sure enough, he found out that he made a mistake.

But now if I said that before everybody, there might have been everybody who was there think that his own was wrong too. And everything might have been, but I *know* mine was wrong. And I certainly glad I was able to figure.

I told my daddy, say "Now Daddy, you see I don't know how long this man doing it, but this figuring was wrong, and I don't know how many other person was wrong, but I didn't say it because I was afraid that everybody would say the same thing, and then he would blame me for it. But can't you see it's good to do your own figuring?"

Of course, I convince him at that time, but he never would do it.

159 *Mr. Esau Jenkins*

## THEN I NOTICE THE GREEKS

(248) I planted cotton for about four, five years--my father and I together.
(241) It takes one whole year to harvest cotton. Then my mind tell me to start with vegetables. Then most of the people start on vegetable farming--truck crop farming, where you can plant three vegetables a year, no doubt four. That's what prompt me to buy a truck.

159 Then I notice as I go into the city to sell my vegetables, most of the
177 stores are operated by Greeks. They buy all kind of vegetables. So I thought
432 the best thing for me to do then is to try to learn the Greeks' language. I could sell more stuff and help me to do more business and help my family better. So I went and took Greek. I took Greek for about a year and a half

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



Of equal importance, if that be possible, with the native quality of the Gullah vernacular, was the environment under which they lived in this country. They seem to have been imported almost exclusively to the sea-islands and coast of two states, South Carolina and Georgia. This section, from Colonial days to the Civil War, was the richest and most cultured of that part of the South. Rice, the chief low-country crop of that day, was extremely lucrative under slave-labor, as was the silky, long-staple sea-island cotton. Large plantations of thousands of acres were the rule, on which the wealthy planters lived in characteristic, often feudal prosperity.[1]

Even today, two generations after the disintegration of the social forces that brought them into existence, there remain impressive traces of these fine old estates, some abandoned and fallen into ruins, a few still kept up, some turned into hunting preserves, some still being farmed on a smaller scale. They stretch in an irregular chain along the coast, inlets, and tidal rivers, each with the gray-weathered dwelling-house in its moss-draped grove of live-oaks; the big barns and slave-quarters off to one side, consisting of a double row of one-story cabins, now in ruins, lining the "street"; square mile after square mile of woodland, marshland, and level fields, once planted to rice, but

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as it was called then, but to this day (1896) the older ones of that set of negroes, who grew up before the war, speak as pure Gullah as their grandfathers and grandmothers spoke on Ashepoo. They seem to have been scarcely affected in their low-country Gullah speech by the white people that were numerous and all around them and the negroes native to that neighborhood, who talked so differently to themselves."

[1] If this seems to savor of the high-flown idyllic plantation tradition, fostered by professional Southerners, romantic literature, melodrama, and minstrel balladry, be it recalled that the ideal picture came closest to being realized in tide-water Virginia and in the rice districts of South Carolina. In regard to these localities it would be hard to overstate the facts. "Charles Dudley Warner, for example, dazzled by the sheen of life in the Carolina rice districts–exclaimed, 'Nowhere in this leveling age . . . so much splendor'." F. P. Gaines, *The Southern Plantation*, Columbia University Press, 1924, p. 64. "Phillips says of the rice section: 'The towns were in sentiment and interest virtually a part of the plantation community and many prospering townsmen looked toward plantation retirement, carrying, as it did, in some degree, the badge of gentility, as the crown of their careers.'" *Ibid.*, 148, 146.

Crevecoeur (*Letters from an American Farmer*, London, 1782.) called the life around Charleston 'the gayest in America'; "Olmstead himself (*Seaboard Slave States, A Journey Through the Seaboard Slave States*, New York, 1856) refers to the rice planters as 'having less vulgar display and more intrinsic elegance than in any distinct class among us'." *Ibid.*, p. 154.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island



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539

After death I got to stan' a tes'
After death I got to stan' a tes'
Oh Lordy, after death I got to stan' a tes'
Lord, I wouldn' mind dyin' if dyin' was all.

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[191]

Dishwashing is another of the monotonous jobs which invite the accompaniment of flowing song. In my own kitchen I have heard dishes disposed of to a tune which, surprisingly enough, has an Algerian counterpart. I heard it first, from my hotel on the heights of Constantine, played on a primitive pipe in the little Berber village at the base of the cliff far below. It was repeated over and over—that is why I am familiar with it. Apparently, the tune bothered a cow, for her bellowing frequently gave me a respite. The air is lovely, but when heard by the hour it is not so enjoyable.

(539)

I want a die easy when I die
O when I die.
I want a die easy when I die
I want a die easy when I die—Shout salvation as I fly
I want a die easy when I die.

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Until after the War Between the States stoves were unknown in the South, and cooking was done mostly in large fireplaces with cranes and hooks for hanging pots and kettles over the heat. Meat was roasted in "tin kitchens" placed in front of the fire, although the remains of an enormous brick oven at Cannon's Point indicate the part it played in the large-scale hospitality of the Couper family. Cooking, in fact, was one of those interrupted jobs which required undivided attention, and for that reason, perhaps, I never heard of a good cook who sang.

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[412]

On St. Simon's and Jekyl Islands great quantities of cotton were grown. The best description of the process was given by Captain Basil Hall in 1828. He tells how the "task" varied with the heaviness of the work. In describing the "listing" of the ground—breaking it with a broad cotton-field hoe—he said that "a full hand lists half an acre." Janey Jackson must have been a full hand, for she told of doing her half-acre and thinking nothing of it. She and Floyd White's parents belonged to the Caters, and both sang a tune which was a favorite for hoeing cotton. They agreed that "June month was a ha'd month": the weeds grew fast and the sun was hot.

(533)

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island



533 567 Quarterman told me that when the Negroes "suspicioned" someone was telling tales to the driver to get one of them a whipping, they would sing a song like the following while at work in the field:

[539]

O Judyus he wuz a 'ceitful man
He went an' betray a mos' innocen' man.
Fo' thirty pieces a silver dat it wuz done
He went in de woods an' e' self he hung.

793 533 A Negro "stump-knocker"—as itinerant preachers without a regular charge used to be called—frankly told me he wasn't much on preaching, but when it came to singing he always got his people—and a meal. Another preacher of this class, with a remarkable flow of rhythmic words and a fine grasp of the dramatic build-up—not necessarily connected with ideas—boasted to me of his ability to get his congregation "goin'."

## FIVE FINGERS IN THE BOLL

248 533 When I asked Josephine what the words "five fingers in the boll" meant, she explained that in the shade at the bottom of the stalk of cotton the bolls are likely to be rotten; they come off in the hand, and "y'u can't make any time grabbin' de cotton out uv 'em." "Fingers" are the compartments holding the white fiber. The song has reference to the variety that contains five in a boll, but I am told that some have three, and others four. I confess I never noticed how many there were.

533 539

Way down in the bottom—whah the cotton boll's a rotten
Won' get my hundud[20] all day
Way down in the bottom—whah the cotton boll's a rotten
Won' get my hundud all day.
Befo'e I'll be beated—befo'e I'll be cheated
I'll leave five finguhs in the boll
Befo'e I'll be beated—befo'e I'll be cheated
I'll leave five finguhs in the boll.
Black man beat me—white man cheat me
Won' get my hundud all day
Black man beat me—white man cheat me
Won' get my hundud all day.

[433] [248]

[20] *Ninety pounds of cotton was looked upon as the least a hand should pick in a day.*

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



101 of slavery? Certainly there is something to be said in favor of the accuracy of the "Gullah or Angola" derivation.

## THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE GULLAH DIALECT

197 Gullah has been called the most African of any of our Negro dialects, yet it can be traced back in practically every detail to English dialect speech. There has long been a popular belief in this country to the effect that Southern white speech is what it is because of the Negro. This idea needs to be reversed, for both the Negro and the white man in the South speak English as they learned it from the latter's ancestors. An understanding of the historical and cultural factors pertaining to the relations of whites and Negroes in the early days of slavery in South Carolina is essential to an appreciation of the origin of the Gullah dialect. These may be sketched very briefly.

175 Speaking of the environment in which the Gullah dialect was born, Smith says:[8]

> This section, from Colonial days to the Civil War, was the richest and most cultured of that part of the South. Rice, the (243) chief low-country crop of that day, was extremely lucrative under slave-labor, as was the silky, long-staple sea-island cotton. Large (248) plantations of thousands of acres were the rule, on which the (567) wealthy planters lived in characteristic, often feudal prosperity. . . . Before the war, each plantation was a little world apart. 175 The slaves lived together, segregated in their own special quarters. 567 The Negroes outnumbered the whites in the ratio of tens and hundreds to one, and only the house-servants and body-servants came into close contact with their owners. The large majority of field-(178) hands habitually saw only each other, their overseers, and occa-

[8] *Gullah*, pp. 9-10.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



175 569 461 249

indigo on St. Helena Island did not interrupt the manufacture of naval stores which was the first occupation of the settlers. After the indigo crop had been laid by, the slaves were employed in "sawing Lumber and making Hogsheads and other Staves, to supply the Sugar Colonies." Indigo culture fitted in so well with the accustomed regime of the settlers that they continued to raise it despite the uncertain returns.

### INTRODUCTION OF SEA-ISLAND COTTON

175 248.

The Revolution virtually cut off the market for indigo and, of course, put an end to the British bounty. The steeping vats had for a long time been considered an additional menace to health in this already unhealthy region.[17] At the same time a new staple, sea-island cotton, which offered fabulous profits, began to be raised in the tidewater region. The seed known in Georgia and South Carolina as sea-island cotton came from the Bahama Islands where it had been introduced by the Board of Trade from Anguilla, an island of the Caribbean Sea.

Several Georgia planters experimented with the seed in 1786, among whom were Thomas Spalding and Alexander Bisset whose plants although sturdy did not ripen pods. Two years later, however, Alexander Bisset exported the first bag of sea-island cotton grown in the United States.[18] To the gratified surprise of the Georgia planters, the fruit yielded a finer fiber than that grown in

[17] *Southern Agriculturist*, Feb., 1828. William Elliott, in his article on indigo, states that he will not admit that the steeping vats "impair the health of the country until I can find that our country has become healthier since the Indigo culture has been superceded by that of Cotton. But I readily admit, that the steeping vats must be unpleasant in those sections where the settlements are thick."

[18] Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, *Memoir on the Origin, Cultivation and Uses of Cotton*, pp. 18, 191; *DeBow's Review*, I, 304.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



175
.248

the Bahamas. The plant was tall; the seed black; and the fiber, long, strong, and silky. Richard Leake, one of those who had first received the seed, at once began production on a large scale. In 1788 he wrote, "I shall raise about 5,000 pounds in the seed from about eighty acres of land and the next year I expect to plant from fifty to one hundred acres."[19]

Seed of the new product was soon obtained in South Carolina, where William Elliott, of Hilton Head Island, near Beaufort and St. Helena, seems in 1790 to have been the first to raise a successful crop.[20] He had bought five and a half bushels of seed at 14 shillings a bushel in Charleston, and he sold his crop at 10½ pence a pound. The following year John Screven, of St. Luke's Parish, planted thirty or forty acres on his plantation on May River and sold the cotton in Georgia at from 1 shilling, 2 pence to 1 shilling, 6 pence sterling a pound. The next year John Rose planted a small field on Oakatee Creek and sold the 600 pounds which he raised at 2 shillings a pound. By this time many other planters on the Sea Islands and the mainland were experimenting with the long staple cotton, and in 1793 such prominent planters as James King, of St. Paul's Parish, Colonel Edward Barnwell and Captain John Joyner, of St. Helena's Parish, and General William Moultrie, of St. John's Parish, Berkeley,

[19] E. J. Donnell, *Chronological and Statistical History of Cotton*, p. 451 Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 152.

[20] The best account of the history of the introduction of sea-island cotton and its culture is to be found in Seabrook, *Memoir on the Origin, Cultivation and Uses of Cotton*. The account in *DeBow's Review*, I, 304-315, is based upon Seabrook's history. J. A. Turner (ed.), *The Cotton Planter's Manual*, pp. 280-286, also contains some information concerning the development of the culture of sea-island cotton.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



175
248.

were growing the cotton. The struggle between indigo and sea-island cotton had already begun. By 1798 the latter had clearly won.

The spread of sea-island cotton planting was largely hastened by the excellent prices which the long-staple brought. The English market welcomed the new staple. In 1799 the cotton sold readily in Liverpool at 5 shillings a pound. In South Carolina, the price ranged from 9 pence to 1 shilling during the early days of the production; then it rose to 2 shillings and upwards and there remained until 1806 when the Franco-English hostilities caused the price to slump. But large fortunes had already been made. Captain James Sinkler received 3 shillings a pound for a crop of 300 acres which produced 216 pounds to the acre. Peter Gaillard, of St. John's, Berkeley, made an average of $340 a hand, and William Brisbane, of St. Paul's, was so wealthy after two years of growing sea-island cotton that he retired and sold his plantation to William Seabrook at an exorbitant price, but Seabrook paid for it in two years.

Not all, however, who planted sea-island cotton realized so great profits as these planters. The longest and silkiest fibers commanded the highest prices. For many years Kinsey Burden, Sr., of St. John's Parish, Colleton, occupied first place in the production of a fine staple, and for many years he carefully guarded the secret of his success. In 1805 he produced cotton worth 25 cents a pound more than that of his neighbors. William Elliott was among the first to guess that the secret of Burden's success lay in the quality of the seed used, and soon sea-island cotton planters everywhere were experimenting

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



175
•248

with seed in the attempt to obtain a silky staple. In 1828 Hugh Wilson sold two bags of extra fine cotton at $2 a pound, probably the highest price ever obtained for sea-island cotton.

The growth of sea-island cotton was limited to a small area along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, for the plant would prosper only in a light, sandy soil, known as the salt-water lands. The sea-island cotton area in the ante-bellum period was a belt of coastal land from twenty to thirty miles wide, extending from Santee River, including St. John's Parish, Berkeley, to the everglades of Florida.[21] Eutaw Springs in St. John's, Berkeley, was the extreme northern point at which the plant was cultivated.

### EARLY METHOD OF CULTIVATION

The planters of the crop quickly systematized the method of cultivation so that, by 1802, the general routine in South Carolina and Georgia was about the same. The seed was planted in early spring as soon as the weather would permit. At first it was planted in separate holes, but soon came to be drilled and the plants grown at intervals of two or three feet on ridges five or six feet apart. Instead of being hoed only four times with the last hoeing about the middle of July, the crop was now hoed at more frequent intervals, all work ceasing when the plant began freely to put out fruit, which was usually early in July. The crop was harvested from September until December. The fiber was quickly damaged by bad weather and the fields, accordingly, had to be picked frequently to save the staple. The bolls opened but slightly and picking was dif-

[21] R. F. W. Allston, *Essay on Sea Coast Crops*, reprinted in *DeBow's Review*, XVI, 593; Seabrook, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 19.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



175
248

ficult so that a hand seldom averaged more than seventy-five or a hundred pounds a day, whereas on the upland cotton fields a hand often picked two hundred pounds or more in a day.

The method of culture in practice in St. Helena's Parish in 1828 has been described by William Elliott, the son of the first planter to raise a successful crop of sea-island cotton in South Carolina:

> The judicious Planter, whose plantation affords him the opportunity of choice, will select for his Cotton field, such high lands of a light brown or yellow complexion, as were covered by an original growth of hickory, laurel, red bay, interspersed with the live and white oaks, and the towering palmetto. He lays out his field into squares, of one-fourth of an acre, (105 feet,) and in the winter months, proceeds to list in the sward, with its cover of fennel or grass. On this *list*, the *bed* is subsequently raised; and, if the ground has lain fallow for some years, or if the soil be naturally close, the plough is sometimes run through the intervals, to pulverize it, and facilitate the process of bedding which is always performed by the hoe and usually commences about the middle of March. The beds are commonly five feet apart from centre to centre. The planting begins about the 20th of March, and extends to the 20th of April, and is thus performed:—A number of holes, four inches deep and twelve inches long, are cut by the hoe on the top of the bed, leaving the space of one foot between each hole. The seed which is changed every second year, is . . . carefully cleansed of such as are *coated* or *tufted with green* (that being considered *an indication of degeneracy*,) and then plentifully dropped and carefully covered. When the plant has attained its fourth or sixth leaf, if no grass should threaten it sooner, it is *hoed down*, which is effected by cutting the bed nicely down, and drawing the earth into the centre of the alley, in the shape of a small list. A fortnight before, or sooner, if the plants show the want of it, the earth is drawn to their roots, and they are slightly thinned.
>
> At every subsequent working, which after the first, is invaria-

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



175
.248

bly a hauling or drawing up the earth to the plants, they are gradually thinned until June, when careful hands are selected to give the final thinning. This is a nice point, on which nothing like uniformity of practice prevails. In high lands, whose fertility has been impaired by frequent cropping, as many as one hundred and twenty stalks may be left in a task row, (105 feet). In newer, stronger or lower lands, where the growth of the plants is increased, the number must be proportionably diminished.

The plants are hauled, whenever the growth is checked by drought or threatened by grass, *until the middle of July*, beyond which period, it is unsafe to haul the earth to any fields but such as have been planted late in the season. . . .

We gather it as soon as possible after it has burst the pods, that it may avoid injury as well from dirt, as from too much exposure to the sun. Women and boys prove the most efficient pickers. The greatest care is used by them to separate the Cotton, all dried leaves or other substances may impair or discolour the staple. It is then spread, if wet, on a scaffold and exposed to the sun; but, if gathered in dry weather, *on the floor in the house*, to suffer whatever moisture it has imbided to escape, before it is stowed away in bulk. It is then passed once through a patent whipper, (M'Birnie's,) and sorted in the seed, at the rate of one to two hundred pounds to the hand. It is now ready for the gin. Eave's was formerly in successful use; but that, as well as the barrel gin, has been superseded by the common foot or crank gin, whose extreme simplicity of structure has given it an advantage over others more efficient, but more complicated . . . thirty pounds of clean Cotton as a day's labour, are easily turned out to each gin. It is then moted, often, but not always, on frames of wire or latticed wood, at a rate varying from fifteen to thirty pounds to the hand, and is then packed and ready for market.[33]

The preparation of the staple for market was the most tedious part of the growth of sea-island cotton. Before 1820, however, this was not considered to be the case.

(113)

[33] William Elliott, "On the Cultivation and High Prices of Sea-Island Cotton," *Southern Agriculturist*, I, 152-154.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



The pickers made no effort to remove the dead leaves from the lint; the ginners allowed stained and unstained cotton to go alike into the gin; moting was accomplished by women who sat upon the floor and beat the cotton with twigs; many planters ginned, moted, and packed the cotton in the same room; and the spinner frequently on opening a bag of cotton would find, in addition to the staple, crushed seeds, potato skins, and parts of old clothing. 175 248•

Sea-island cotton prepared in this manner was suited only for coarse fabrics. As the demand for the long staple became greater for making fine laces and muslins and as the high prices went to those who carefully handled their cotton, planters were forced to use more painstaking methods. The gin house, although only a simple barn, had separate rooms for the different processes. The cotton on being gathered was never exposed to the sun as formerly, but dried on a scaffold inside. Upon being dried, it was taken to the whipper which extracted the sand and imperfect fibers, and then sent to the assorters each of whom, provided with boxes for clean cotton, worked before a long table covered with wire or wooden slats, sorting the cotton according to color and fineness. From the sorters the staple went to the gins, and from there to the moting tables where women picked out the broken seeds and stained fibres. The lint was then packed into round bags of about three hundred pounds each, 1,500 pounds of seed cotton being required for a bale of this size.

Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, of Edisto Island, estimated in 1844 that fifty-four laborers[22] were required to prepare (464)

[22] This estimate was based upon the use of the foot-gin which was ordinarily employed in 1860 as well as in 1844. When a steam gin was used the number of ginners was reduced to six; when an Eave's improved steam gin, to three.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



the seed cotton for market as follows: one dryer; one turner and one feeder of the whipper; thirty assorters, grading fifty pounds each a day; twelve ginners, preparing twenty-five pounds of lint each a day; seven moters at forty-three pounds each; a packer and a re-inspector. Estimating the services of each slave at 50 cents a day, Seabrook concluded that it cost a planter $27 to gin a bale of sea-island cotton.[24] On the average plantation it required from fifty to sixty days of labor to cultivate and gin a bale of fine cotton.[25]

In the production of naval stores, the cultivation of indigo, and the growth of the long staple cotton, planters soon learned that their most urgent need was a larger labor supply than the sparsely settled province could afford. They turned for this supply to the African slave market.

[24] Seabrook, *Memoir on the Origin, Cultivation and Uses of Cotton*, p. 31.
[25] Allston, *Essay on Sea Coast Crops*, p. 15.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



SIZE OF SLAVEHOLDINGS IN BEAUFORT DISTRICT[11]

175
569

| Number of Slaves | Slaveowners: Number | | Slaveowners: Per Cent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1790 | 1860 | 1790 | 1860 |
| 1 slave | 73 | 78 | 12.5 | 7.3 |
| 2 and under 5 | 88 | 173 | 15.1 | 16.1 |
| 5 and under 10 | 95 | 204 | 16.2 | 19.0 |
| 10 and under 20 | 86 | 188 | 14.7 | 17.6 |
| 20 and under 50 | 150 | 216 | 25.6 | 20.2 |
| 50 and under 100 | 69 | 142 | 11.8 | 13.2 |
| 100 and under 200 | 20 | 51 | 3.4 | 4.8 |
| 200 and under 300 | 3 | 13 | 0.5 | 1.3 |
| 300 and under 500 | 0 | 4 | 0.0 | 0.4 |
| 500 and under 1,000 | 1 | 1 | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| Total | 585 | 1,070 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Although the number of slaveholders in 1860 had increased 83.9 per cent over that of 1790, the distribution in the two periods, according to the size of holdings, did not vary appreciably. In 1790 some 58.5 per cent of the slaveowners had less than twenty slaves and in 1860 only 60 per cent had less than that number, a difference of less than two per cent. In 1790 those owning more than one hundred slaves were 4.1 per cent of the total, while in 1860 they were 6.6 per cent, a difference of 2.5 per cent. The only significant change in the distribution of the size of holdings occurred in the class possessing from twenty to fifty slaves. In 1790 this group was a fourth of the total, but in 1860 it had been reduced to a fifth.

While the general average for the district in 1860 would place every owner in the rank of a planter, it is significant that three-fifths of the slaveholders in the district owned less than twenty slaves. With less than this number a man engaged in the cultivation of sea-island

(248)

[11] *Agricultural Census, 1860*, p. 237; *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States, 1790: State of South Carolina*, pp. 10-13.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



175
S87
(248)

cotton, the staple crop in 1860, could not hope to engage in large scale production. Only 19.8 per cent owned more than fifty slaves and only one planter owned more than five hundred. The conclusion must be, therefore, that the majority of those engaged in agriculture in this district, one of the most densely populated slave counties in the entire South, belonged to the small planter class.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of slaves owned by St. Helena planters at any given time.[18] The first census of the United States shows that only four men in Beaufort District, none of whom lived on St. Helena Island, owned more than two hundred slaves in 1790. Frederick Witsell had 607; Thomas Heyward, 265; General Stephen Bull, 233; and John Rutledge (who lived in Charleston), 217. Of those living on St. Helena, the plantation of William Fripp with 153 slaves had the largest number; that of John Jenkins with 136 slaves, the next largest. The other holdings were considerably less. Thomas Chaplin had 65 slaves; William Chaplin, 50; John Chaplin, 30; Paul Fripp, 37; Thomas Fripp, 33; John Fripp, 38; Charles Capers, 45; William Capers, 15; John Cowen, 13; Peter Perry, 45; George Pope, 39.

Early in 1862 Edward L. Pierce, special agent for the United States Treasury Department, estimated that there was an average of forty slaves to a plantation on St.

[18] The courthouse at Gillisonville, the seat of Beaufort District, was destroyed by Sherman's Army in 1864. Later the county seat was changed to Beaufort, and in 1883 the courthouse there was destroyed by fire. Practically all of the ante-bellum county records have, therefore, been destroyed. The MS, "Return of Tax Collected by John M. Baker in the Parish of St. Helena for the Year Commencing Oct. 1, 1860" (in possession of William Elliott, Columbia, S. C.), does not contain a list of slaves. This MS is a duplicate of the original which Congressman William Elliott said in a written statement that he deposited in the Court of Claims. A search through some of the files of the Court has failed to reveal the original.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

CHAPTER IV

# SEA-ISLAND COTTON CULTURE

## THE PLANTING ROUTINE

• 248 THE CULTIVATION of sea-island cotton produced a characteristic system of agriculture. The average sea-island planter cultivated a little less than six acres to the hand. Had the plough been substituted for the hoe, the acreage per hand would have been twice as much. In addition to cotton, the planter raised corn and sweet potatoes as provision crops in the proportion of about seven-twelfths cotton, three-twelfths corn, and two-twelfths sweet potatoes. The average yield of cotton was about 135 pounds to the acre; of corn, fifteen to twenty-five bushels of the southern white-flint variety; and of potatoes, about 150 bushels to the acre.[1]

Since cotton was the main crop of the sea-island planter, he tended to consider that acres planted in provision crops were somewhat of a loss. It was seldom, therefore, that a planter raised enough corn and potatoes to furnish his plantation throughout the year, for the acreage in provision crops was determined not so much by the amount of provisions required as by the number of acres which the hands could attend while working the cotton crop. Factors' statements and the plantation books available indicate that sea-island cotton planters made frequent purchases of corn, rice, and bacon for provisions.

The planting season began about the middle of March, although the preparation of the soil started much earlier in

[1] Turner, *Cotton Planter's Manual*, p. 133. With reference to the crops of St. Helena see Pierce, "Report of the Government Agent," in *Rebellion Records*, sup., I, 306.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



the year. Cotton was planted from about March 20 to April 10; corn about April 1; and sweet potatoes the latter part of March. The routine of labor on a sea-island cotton plantation from planting time until the crops were laid by is illustrated by that on John Fripp's Bluff plantation of 560 acres as recorded in his plantation book for 1856. The spring of this year was cold and wet so that Fripp was late in putting in his crops. 248.

He did his first planting on March 20 and 21 when he banked and planted four acres of potatoes. The weather prevented his planting again until April 7 when he put in the rest of his potatoes, two more acres. On the tenth he commenced banking and planting cotton, and by the sixteenth he had put in thirty-eight acres which he recorded were doing "fine." Three days later he began putting in the corn crop and planted that day eighteen acres in the "Savannah swamp field." On the twenty-second he planted twenty-three acres of cotton in the "Marsh field." A week later he commenced the regular corn crop and by the first of May had planted in all sixty-three acres. The next day he planted twelve more acres of cotton in the swamp field and on May 3 put in three-fourths of an acre of rice in the small fresh water ponds by "Point field." On the twelfth and thirteenth he finished planting cotton, making a total of 121 acres.

The hands were busy hoeing cotton from that time until the twenty-second of May when they stopped to put in fifteen acres of "Shinney Peas." Two days later Fripp detailed a few hands to put in an acre of rice near the swamp field. All hands resumed cotton hoeing until July 5 when Fripp began to plant the first of his potato slips. 248 464 567

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



From then until August a few hands put in a half acre or less a day, planting in all sixteen acres of potatoes. Work on the cotton crop stopped about the middle of July. Fripp finished planting about the first of September when he had two acres of potato slips put in for seed and three-fourths of an acre of turnip seed sown.

By November 29 he had gathered and finished "breaking in" the corn crop, having made 650 bushels, less than 12 bushels to the acre. By December 9 he had finished digging potatoes, having made a poor crop, and four days later he had gathered all the cotton. On December 13 the hands began processing the cotton and did not finish ginning the crop of thirty-five bales until February 12, just in time to begin listing the soil in preparation for drilling in the cotton seed a few weeks later. During the slack periods, the hands had been engaged in digging and hauling marsh mud to manure the fields, cutting marsh grass for fodder and also for fertilizer, cutting and sawing wood, and ditching fields.[2]

St. Helena Island planters, as a rule, obtained the simplest of farm implements for their laborers. Most of the work in cultivating sea-island cotton was done with the hoe. In 1822 there was not a plough or scythe on Edisto, one of the best cultivated of the Sea Islands. The largest plantations had only two or three carts; the use of oxen was unknown.[3] By 1844 nearly every plantation on the island had a cart and mule or yoke of oxen to every six taskable hands. At the close of the ante-bellum period, however, John F. Townsend was the only planter who

[2] MS, John E. Fripp, Bluff Plantation Book.
[3] Seabrook, *Memoir on the Cultivation of Cotton*, p. 25.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



175 248 407 493 C492 175

used plows to any extent.[4] Only a few planters on St. Helena Island, such as Thomas A. Coffin and Dr. W. J. Jenkins, used plows, and when a plow was used it was more often drawn by an ox than a mule.[5]

In 1856 when John E. Fripp, of St. Helena Island, bought the Chechessee Bluff plantation of about 560 acres on Oakatee Creek, he equipped it as follows: a saddle, or sulkey, horse and a pair of carriage horses; four mules; eighty-eight stock cattle; six oxen; a large flat boat and two small ones; four good and three "indifferent" plows; three mule or horse carts, two ox carts, one good ox wagon, one ox wagon needing repairs, one mule, or ox, wagon needing a body, one carriage and one sulkey; four sets of cart harness; plow line chains; collars; one small corn mill, a small sugar mill and "fixings"; spades, axes, and hoes.[6]

Although various gins for extracting the seed from sea-island cotton were invented, the only kind used to any extent on St. Helena Island at the close of the ante-bellum period was the old foot-gin, the kind first invented for that purpose. Planters complained that the Negroes quickly broke the more complicated machines. The *Cotton Planter's Manual* described the foot-gins as follows:

248

248 407

These simple machines are 3½ feet high, 2 feet long, and 1 wide, with an iron fly-wheel like that of a "box corn-sheller," upon each side, working a pair of wooden rollers, made of hard oak, about ten inches long and nearly an inch in diameter, held together by screws. . . . These rollers wear out, and have to be replaced by new ones every day. . . . The rollers are moved by the foot, like

[4] Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

[5] See MS, Port Royal Correspondence. In archives of U. S. Treasury Department.

[6] John E. Fripp, Bluff Plantation Book.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248 407 a small turning lathe, the operator standing at one end of the gin, feeding the cotton very slowly through the rollers, leaving the smooth black seeds behind. . . . Twenty or thirty of these little machines stand in one room; and, strange to say, none of those who have attempted to propel them by other power have succeeded. One very intelligent gentleman told me that he had spent $5,000 in trying experiments in machinery to gin this kind of cotton.[7]

### BEGINNING OF EXPERIMENTAL AGRICULTURE

248 Although sea-island cotton in the early days of its introduction was one of the most profitable crops ever raised in the South, the increase of its production and the varying fineness of the fiber caused a wide fluctuation in the price. Thus while some planters realized considerable profits, others were hard put to make expenses. As early as 1826 the most progressive planters in nearly every parish which grew "sea-islands" began to inquire into the causes of this condition. They organized agricultural societies[8] in the attempt to improve the general methods of culture and to standardize the prices; they subscribed to agricultural magazines; they wrote articles; they sent out questionnaires.

[175] In 1828 William Elliott, of St. Helena's Parish, writing in the *Southern Agriculturist*, expressed the general sentiment of sea-island planters on this important subject. He said:

I shall turn to the consideration of a question, which it is of a paramount importance that a Sea-Island Planter should examine and

[7] Turner, *Cotton Planter's Manual*, p. 135.

[8] The St. Helena Agricultural Society was organized prior to February, 1843. *The Southern Agriculturist* of that date contains a letter from Daniel Jenkins, the secretary, on the unsuccessful experiment of some St. Helena planters in packing sea-island cotton in square bales.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248

understand; viz. "What is the cause of the difference of price given for Cotton, grown even on adjoining plantations?" . . . latterly, the range of price has baffled all calculation, and has extended to such a pitch, that a favoured Planter has been known to obtain for his crop, *five times the price* obtained by his immediate neighbour. . . . Yet it must be confessed, that this unsettled state of things accompanied by its apparent system of favoritism, has a most discouraging effect on Planters. When they who enjoy equal advantages, as to salt exposure, practice equal assiduity in the application of salt manures, bestow equal care on the preparation of their staple, find that all these advantages and this care go for nothing—that the extra expense incurred by their superior preparation was equal to ten or twelve cents per pound—while one or two cents advance on the average price, was all their compensation; that the money thus profitably expended by the majority of growers, went to the exclusive profit of the foreign agent or manufacturer; while here and there some solitary, envied Planter, received a disproportionate reward for his labours. When these things are considered, it is not to be wondered at, that they are discouraged, and that they are ready to substitute any other culture which may offer to industry and skill, a competent and an equal remuneration. For, if the high rate of valuation, at which their lands and negroes have been acquired, whether inherited or purchased, be taken into the account, it will be confessed, that few investments of capital have yielded for the last ten years so trifling a return, as that of the Sea-Island Planters. The prices have never been high, and, whenever a full crop has crowned the wishes of the Planter, the price was sure to fall by anticipation.

. . . To the Vanderhorsts', the Seabrooks', Matthews', Coffins', and Popes', and others of that fortunate class, whose names give title to the highest prices in the agricultural lottery, I offer no advice. But, to the majority of Planters cultivating the Sea-Islands, or points of the mainland, inclosed by the arms of the sea, the debatable lands, as it were, of the culture, I would say, persevere yet a while in your efforts to approach the standard of these favoured names;—if that be, from physical causes impossible, hope

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



•248 yet longer, that, what happens in all other pursuits, will eventually happen in yours; viz. that a *gradation of prices may be established*, and that your cotton may meet the common justice, to be rated according to its fineness and cleanness, and not continue to be classed, as heretofore, with cotton the meanest, if it did not happen to equal the best.[9]

The Coffins and Popes, whose cotton Elliott mentioned as invariably receiving the top prices in market, were St. Helena Island planters.[10] Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, another successful planter, was one of the first to spread knowledge of the improved methods of cultivation. In 1826 he sent a questionnaire to several planters who were considered the most efficient growers of the staple. Thomas Aston Coffin, of Coffin's Point plantation, St. Helena Island, received one of these questionnaires.[11]

[9] Elliott, "On the Cultivation and High Prices of Sea-Island Cotton," *Southern Agriculturist*, I, 154-161.

[10] The Coffin trademark was a "pinch-toe" coffin.

[11] W. B. Seabrook, *A Report Accompanied with Sundry Letters*, pp. 25-27; Coffin's letter dated Dec. 26, 1826. His reply was as follows:

"1. Is all your cotton equally fine?

I think not, but I have never heard purchasers remark any difference . . .

"2. What manure do you esteem best?

I have generally used the marsh mud taken from the creeks; sometimes green marsh.

"3. Is your cotton so distinguished for one quality, remarkable for others, &c?

My cotton derives its character from its silkiness, strength and evenness of fibre.

"4. What has been your average crop for the last seven years? and what quantity do you plant to the hand?

Caterpillars and storms have destroyed some of my most promising crops; but I think 450 lbs. per hand are about the average. I generally plant nearly three and a half acres to the hand.

"5. Are you particular in the selection of your seed? . . .

I have generally preserved the seed from my earliest pickings; sometimes I have planted seed, exchanged with my friends, both North and South. I think the cotton produced from the seed, with a green tuft, the finest and most silky, though not the most productive.

"6. . . .

"7. Do you preserve your seed, &c?

I am not particular, so that it is kept dry.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248

The result of the wide differences in prices paid for sea-island cotton and the planters' subsequent attempt to remedy this situation led to improvements in the methods of agriculture, such as, the careful selection of seed, fertilization of the soil, soil analysis, and the rotation of crops. Instead of planting seed without regard to its origin, planters sought to obtain improved and tested strains. From 1826 to 1830 the Kinsey Burden seed was considered the most superior on the market; in 1854 "Owen's Selection," named for George C. Owens, was in highest favor.[12] At least three St. Helena Island planters gave their names to seed which was of high repute: Coffin, Pope, and Fripp. In 1868, when good sea-island cotton seed was extremely difficult to obtain, James Gregorie's factor in Charleston wrote to him, "I understand from

"8. Do you in gathering your crop pick those pods, which, from their immaturity, are imperfectly open, &c?

My orders are to pass over defective pods, to save the trouble of selecting them, when assorting; but, from the difficulty of seeing these executed, I presume they are much neglected, especially after frost.

"9. Do you dry your cotton in the sun or shade, and how long?

Generally one day on a scaffold, unless the cotton has been wet.

"10. What is your mode of preparation?

. . . I handle it as little as possible after it comes from the gin.

"11. Are you in the habit of using the whipper?

Before cotton goes to the gin, but not after.

"12. What is the character of your soil and situation?

High and low; mostly high; a yellow mixed sand on the hills, and black or grey in the narrow vallies which run N.E. and S.W. through the extent of the Island. I am on a neck of land, two sides are bounded by creeks, and one side by the ocean.

"I have *once* used a *machine gin* from St. Simons' Island, to the rollers of which, made of hickory, I gave as many as six hundred revolutions in a minute. I ginned about twenty bales of cotton with this gin, and heard no complaint about the staple being injured; but my negroes were continually putting it out of order, and my impelling power proving defective, I laid it aside. I introduced this remark, hoping the want of a gin, as well adapted to the Sea-Island Cotton as Whitney's saw gin is to the upland, may stimulate some of our planters, in this exertion, to produce one."

[12] Allston, *Essay on Sea Coast Crops*, p. 13.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



•248

Isaac his seed is the genuine old Fripp seed, if so take care & don't get it mixed with other seed so that you can furnish your friends with it next year."[113]

In the attempt to raise a staple with a fine, long fiber, sea-island cotton planters, while achieving this goal through a careful selection of seed, at the same time acquired a plant of small fruitage and consequently of slender yield, sacrificing quantity for the quality of the product. By force of circumstances, therefore, they were compelled to resort to every possible means of keeping the yield up to the maximum.

In the early days of the plantation regime when planters used any fertilizer at all it was for their potato fields, for they used only virgin land for their cotton. When the fields first selected for cotton became exhausted, as they invariably did in a few years, they again resorted to virgin land, clearing the land by girdling the trees, without taking the trouble to remove them, so that a cotton field was often a cemetery of dead oaks and palmettos which made the use of the plow impossible. In 1826 Robert Mills wrote, "The bulk of the planters, relying on the fertility of the soil, seldom plant any land but what is good, and change the same when it begins to fail for what is fresh, giving themselves little trouble to keep their fields in heart."[114] Even late in the ante-bellum period this expedient was still the most popular one.[115]

In some cases necessity forced the planter to drain the swamps and marshes and convert them into cotton fields.

[113] MS, John Colcock to James Gregorie, Charleston, April 9, 1861. In possession of Dr. M. G. Elliott, Beaufort, S. C.

[114] *Statistics of South Carolina*, pp. 155, 156.

[115] Seabrook, *Memoir on Cotton*, p. 24.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



These reclaimed tracts often proved very fertile so that in the later ante-bellum period, a few sea-coast planters quite generally engaged in draining and embanking marshes and swamps. In 1844 Mr. Seabrook, of Edisto, thought that the immense tracts of unreclaimed swamps "which lie along the line where the salt and fresh water meet . . . are capable of yielding an amount of cotton wool equal to the yearly exports of the State."[16]

248.

### MARSH MUD AND SEA-ISLAND COTTON

A few planters fertilized their cotton fields soon after the introduction of the new staple; in fact, all the materials used as manure in the later ante-bellum period were employed as early as 1805 in a limited way by some sea-island planters, but it was not until 1825 that the methods of manuring became generally known.

Planters found that salt-marsh[17] mud which was within easy reach of most of the cotton fields, was the cheapest and one of the most profitable manures that they could obtain. It was usually applied to the soil at the rate of about forty-one cart loads to the acre. Planters employed various methods of adding it to their fields. On Edisto Island most of them preferred to use it as soon as dug. The Whaley plantation on Little Edisto was divided into halves, each half being planted in alternate years. Slaves went out in boats on the creeks and rivers to the nearby marshes, loaded their boats with the mud, and returned to empty it in ox-carts or hand-woven baskets

[567]

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[17] The term "saltmarsh" was used on the coast to apply to the mud and other matters of which the marsh is composed.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



• 248
[567]

to be "toted" to the fields by other slaves.[18] The mud was then listed in. On the John F. Townsend plantation it was plowed in, but Mr. Townsend was the only man on the island who used plows to any extent.

Some planters dried the mud before spreading it upon the land. Tuomey's *Geological Survey of South Carolina* of 1848 recommends charring the mud to diminish its weight so that it might be transported profitably some distance up the rivers and so that it would fix the volatile products of decomposition on being added to a barn-yard manure heap.[19] Other planters made a compost[20] of the mud. R. F. W. Allston, writing in 1854 on the sea-coast crops, stated that the usual compost was prepared in summer "by mixing with farm-yard, cowpen and stable litter, salt marsh, marsh mud, and even salt."[21] It was applied to the land in winter at the rate of forty, fifty, and seventy cart loads. He considered that the best method of using this compost was, first, to prepare the land in the autumn by listing in the remaining growth as soon as the crop had been picked, even before the cotton had been prepared for market, and then in the spring to make a bed on the autumn listing by drawing up with a hoe the earth which had been well manured in the winter with the marsh-mud compost.

The proportion of marsh mud to barnyard manure used in this compost was based upon the character of the

[18] J. Swinton Whaley, "The History of Sea-Island Cotton." Unpublished manuscript.

[19] Tuomey, *Geology of South Carolina*, p. 232.

[20] For a discussion of composts see F. A. Procher, "Report on Manures," in *Southern Agriculturist*, new ser., V, no. I, 1-13; Turner, *Cotton Planter's Manual*, pp. 70-80, 85-93.

[21] Allston, *Essay on Sea Coast Crops*, p. 13.

[113]

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248.

land and the experience of the planter. Colonel Edward Barnwell, of St. Helena's Parish, considered his success in sea-island cotton planting to be due entirely to his method of preparing compost. He descanted so much on compost that one of his friends once remarked that Edward Barnwell would put compost into his will. He did. He left a certain Negro to a son who intended to be a planter "because he knows all about making compost, without which a plantation is of no value."

While some planters brought the marsh mud to the manure heaps, still others mixed the mud and the manure on the fields themselves by "running a cowpen." The plantation cattle, which numbered as many as could be pastured upon the "field at rest" and the woodland, usually twenty to every five hands,[22] were penned on succeeding nights in movable yards on the resting field, which was littered with fine straw and marsh grass. The tramping of the cattle excellently prepared the field for a top dressing of marsh mud. Sometimes marsh grass was laid between the old rows after running the cowpen but before the mud was applied. Then, the sod of one year's growth was hoed down into the alleys and the bed formed upon it.[23]

Some planters used as a fertilizer only the marsh grass, often called simply "saltmarsh." "St. Helena," writing in 1837 for the *Southern Agriculturist* on the cultivation of sea-island cotton, explained his method of applying marsh grass as follows:

> It may . . . be gathered in the summer, and put up in heaps, for use in the following spring. Where the planter alternates his

[22] Turner, *Cotton Planter's Manual*, p. 87.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



• 248

fields, the marsh may be spread out in the alleys of the vacant field, and immediately listed in. This mode is decidedly preferable; because, putting in the marsh at so early a period, gives it abundant time to rot, by the ensuing spring. But where the same field is planted for any number of consecutive years, the marsh must be put up in heaps to rot during the summer; for the field is then occupied with the cotton. With a good scythe, it may be fairly estimated, that one fellow will do six times as much at cutting marsh, as in digging mud: and when it is considered that six cart-loads of marsh, will manure a task better than 21 loads of mud, the balance is greatly in favor of marsh. Rushes do as well as marsh, where the land does not require salt. . . . Some planters object to marsh, and say that it produces "blue" in cotton; but no one need apprehend this, if the marsh has been put into the land so as to give it sufficient time to rot, before the cotton-plant reaches it.[24]

The value of the marsh mud as a manure for sea-island cotton land depended not only upon its effect in promoting retention of moisture but also upon the saline, organic, and calcareous matter which it contained. Most of the marsh mud, however, has a very low content of carbonate of lime and is not a sufficient fertilizer for soils deficient in calcareous matter. Some planters met this deficiency by the addition of crushed oyster shells which everywhere appear in great abundance along the banks of the rivers and creeks of the Sea Islands. John Couper, even before 1800, spread crushed oyster shells on his cotton lands on St. Simon's Island every other year and in the alternate years gave them a top dressing of marsh mud.[25] Yet the benefits of shells, or marl, to sea-island cotton land was so little known in the late ante-bellum period that Professor

[24] *Southern Agriculturist*, X, 175.
[25] MS in Couper-Wylly Papers.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248

Charles U. Shepard, in reporting on the nature of the soils of Edisto Island to St. John's, Colleton, Agricultural Society, suggested that "the peculiar fertility of new sea-island cotton land" may be "owing to the proportion of comminuted shells natural to such soils, and the deterioration of these lands under long cultivation, ascribable to the exhaustion of carbonate of lime."[26] He strongly urged, therefore, that planters add pulverized oyster shells to their cotton fields or be careful to use a marsh mud which abounded in a gravel of feldspar and hornblende.[27] The old indigo heaps, the refuse of the vats, offered the planter another source of lime for his cotton fields. The lime used in the preparation of the dye had become mixed with earthy matters and was especially beneficial to the cotton fields.

A few planters experimented with the commercial fertilizers, especially guano and its substitutes. The *American Agriculturist*, writing in the late ante-bellum period on the crops of Edisto Island, earnestly recommended planters to use guano, which contains "the same fertilizing properties of muck, in an hundredfold degree," and suggested that they apply about 200 pounds to the acre, plowed in deep, or buried in the bottom of the cotton beds, making sure, however, to use "none but the best Peruvian, and purchase it from a reliable merchant, so as to be sure it is genuine."[28] By the close of the ante-bellum period planters in the sea-island cotton belt quite generally used some kind of fertilizer.

[26] Tuomey, *Geology of South Carolina*, p. xlii.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 234. Edmund Ruffin examined a specimen from a shell bank on Distant Island near Beaufort and found it contained 47 per cent of carbonate of lime.

[28] Printed in Turner, *Cotton Planter's Manual*, pp. 132-133.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



242 Seabrook, however, thought this rotation unfitted for the South Carolina Sea Islands "where the high lands, which are limited in quantity, and unfit for corn, are alone considered safe for cotton." Instead, he recommended as a good rotation to be followed " in a small way," potatoes, or spring peas, rest, and cotton.[34]

"Rest" was the common practice of "rotation" on the Sea Islands. When the land had become exhausted by repeated cropping, its fertility was restored not only by the application of manures, but by resting the field for a certain length of time. The time necessary for restoration was dependent, of course, upon the nature of the subsoil. Enterprising planters hastened the process by thoroughly breaking up the soil, thereby exposing fresh surfaces to the atmosphere and turning the grass and weeds under to enrich the soil.

### THE AGRICULTURAL LOTTERY

248 Despite these efforts at scientific farming, which resulted in methods that are generally considered as belonging to present day agricultural development, sea-island cotton was an uncertain crop. In 1808 David Ramsay, writing the history of South Carolina, spoke of planting as an annual lottery, in which on an average of several years there were many blanks and many prizes. "A few of the latter," he wrote, "are very large, but the greatest number do not much exceed the price of the ticket."[35] In successful seasons, profits were large. One crop might purchase the land which raised it; two or three more, the Negroes who cultivated it. But in unsuccessful years,

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[35] David Ramsay, *The History of South-Carolina*, II, 396.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248.

planters felt the pinch of hard times. A late, wet spring might defer planting until there could be no hope of maturing an average yield before frost. Had the spring been propitious, an unseasonable frost might blight the plant and decrease the crop. Excess of rain or drought might retard the crop or the plant might develop a disease. When the crop was made and ready to be gathered, a storm or hurricane might blast the labor of a year. When the crop was gathered and baled ready for market, economic conditions at home or abroad might reduce the price so low as to plunge the planter into debt.

The diseases to which sea-island cotton were subject, blight, rust, and "blue," were generally considered as arising from some defect in the soil.[36] They could be removed, or at least considerably remedied, by thoroughly draining the land and applying the proper fertilizer at the proper season. But the plant louse, cut worm, and the leaf worm, or caterpillar, as it was commonly known, could not be so easily combated. The plant louse was practically a yearly pest which planters fought by cultivation, attempting to raise a plant hardy enough to withstand the attacks of the insect. The cut worm often appeared in wet seasons and on low lands insufficiently drained. James Hamilton Couper recorded in his plantation book when commenting on the crop for 1818:

248
136

> The cut-worm was so destructive, until the 18th. of May, as to have killed the cotton, as soon up, with the exception of the high parts of the old & new fields. They were universally found in the East River Field. It is believed that the Fresh, which covered the fields from the 5th. to the 21st. of March was the cause of their appearance in such numbers.[37]

[36] Allston, *Sea Coast Crops*, pp. 14, 15.
[37] Hopeton Plantation Book.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



The weather not only abetted the insects in their destruction of the cotton crops, but sometimes itself brought ruin. In 1819 James Hamilton Couper was found recording in his plantation book, "In the Spring, the Cotton was very generally destroyed by Frost," and "On the night of the 14th Oct^r. a sharp white frost destroyed about 70 acres of cotton at Hopeton."[41] In 1823 he wrote:

> The crop was set in good time; and was unusually promising until the excessive rains which commenced about the middle of July. These rains continued nearly two months, and occasioned the cotton to drop nearly the whole of the middle & under crop. The upper crop in quantity and maturity promised well, but from the diseased habit which the plant had acquired never opened.[42]

In 1826 he wrote, "This is the only cotton crop since 1818 which has not been cut off by spring freshes, early fall frosts, or gales of wind," and the following year he again recorded, "A very high fresh which occurred about the end of May nearly destroyed the Cotton in Carr's Is." There were heavy rains again in 1828 and 1829, and in 1830 "a very severe Hail Storm was so destructive to the cotton crop, that the failure . . . was nearly entire." With this year, Couper left off recording his observations on crops, but in a letter to his son in 1855 he wrote, "We have had a glut of rain during the week; and as was to be expected the cotton is shedding freely. Three fourths of the Cotton crops are destroyed by the August rains."[43]

in embryo, as the energetic planter . . . has already done." He doubtless refers to dusting the plants with a mixture of Paris green, resin, and damaged wheat flour.

[41] Hopeton Plantation Book. [42] *Ibid.*

[43] Couper-Wylly Letters, August 23, 1855, James Hamilton Couper to Hamilton Couper.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248 132 133 The southern sea coast is subject to autumnal storms which occasionally destroy the planters' entire crop. Sir Charles Lyell, in his second visit to the United States in 1841 and 1842, commented upon this fact, mentioning that in 1756 the entire coast from St. Simon's Island, Georgia, as far north as Charles Town (Charleston) was overflowed, the sea rising six feet above its ordinary level.[44] Parts of the Sea Islands were under water in 1804 and 1824. In the latter year the crops were unusually promising. John Couper had matured a crop of some six hundred bales worth $90,000, but he lost most of the crop in twelve hours by the hurricane of September 14.[45] The next year his crop was nearly destroyed by caterpillars. On September 8, 1854, the coast was again visited by a destructive hurricane,[46] and since the ante-bellum period by two, one in 1893 and one in 1911, which have caused great suffering and loss of life.

248 [136] [730]

248 THE PLANTER AND HIS FACTOR

The very uncertainty of the crop, as well as the nature of it, tied the planter to the system of factorage so well known in England and other countries long before the settlement of the American colonies. Commission merchants in Charleston and Savannah readily credited sea-island cotton planters who might in one year make enough to pay off the debts of several years accumulation. It was customary, therefore, for the planter to spend his money before

[44] Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, I, 253.

[45] Couper-Wylly Letters. May 24, 1828, John Couper to his brother James Couper.

[46] U. B. Phillips, *Documentary History of American Industrial Society, Plantation and Frontier*, I, 141.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248.

he had made it, and it was the factor who enabled him to do so.[47] He sold the planter's cotton on commission. He

[47] See factors' statements and letters in the McPherson and Gregorie Papers, and the John E. Fripp Papers. The following statement is John E. Fripp's account with his factor from September, 1856, to May, 1857:

Cr.——John E. Fripp, Esqr.——In Account——Current with——
Coffin & Pringle

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1856 | | | | | |
| July 22 | By Balance at your credit as pr. account rendered | | | | 86.77 |
| November 20 | By Nett Sales of 3 Bags sold in Liverpool say £50. 13.10 | | | | |
| | £39.19.01 @ 9¼% | 194 | | | |
| | £10.14.09 @ 8½ % | 57.77 | 245.77 | | |
| | £50.13.10 | | | | |
| | Less advance recd. 17th June last | 194 | | | |
| | " 127 days Interest on advance from 5th September last to maturity of Sales 10th January 1857 @ 6% | 4.01 | | | |
| | " our commission @ 2½% on balance say on $51.77 | 1.29 | 199.30 | | 46.47 |
| 1857 | | | | | |
| January 5 | By received for T. M. Hanckel's order upon Legare & Colcock | | | | 135.75 |
| February 20 | By received for 3 Hides | | | | 11.10 |
| April 13 | By Nett Proceeds of 11 Bags Cotton as pr. Sales rendered | | | | 1,718.85 |
| | | | | | $1,998.94 |

"Dr.——John E. Fripp, Esqr.——In Account——Current with——
Coffin & Pringle

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1856 | | | |
| September 30 | To Sundry Postages paid to date | | .28 |
| November 26 | " remitted him | | 50.00 |
| | " 94 yds California Kersey @ 40c | | 37.60 |
| | " 124½ yds Brown Plains @ 34c | | 42.33 |
| | " 44½ yds Union Plains @ 25c | | 11.12 |
| | " 56 Blankets | | 129.20 |
| | " 20 yds Satinet @ 62½c | | 12.50 |
| | " 1 pc Red Flannel 35 yds @ 25c | | 8.75 |
| | " 1 pc Long Cloth 40½ yds @ 15c | | 6.07 |

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



• 248 sold him on credit the provisions on which his plantation operated: his Negro cloth, his farm implements, frequently his cotton seed, and much of his corn and bacon. He paid the planter's taxes and cashed his drafts.

Frequently the planter and his factor were related by blood ties so that the agent had an additional incentive to treat him as a preferred creditor. While the relation between individual planter and factor was often friendly, there was in general a feeling of resentment between the two. When the planter's crop failed, his factor might consider that the failure was due, in part at least, to mismanagement; while the planter constantly regarded his factor's commissions as too high. An Edisto planter who once raised large crops of sea-island cotton still speaks with bitterness of the more than hundred years of bondage in which Charleston factors held sea-island planters.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | " 1 ps Bleached Homespun 47 yds @ 12½c | 5.88 |
| | | " 48 pair Shoes @ $1.10 | 52.80 |
| | | " Freight $2.72 Drayage 19c | 2.91 |
| 1857 | | | |
| January | 1 | " paid his order to B. S. Screven | 50.00 |
| March | 3 | " paid him | 500.00 |
| | 4 | " paid 8 Months & 13 days Interest on his Bond for $3415 to John Webb to date | 154.60 |
| | | & on account of the Principal of said Bond | 1,345.00 |
| | | & one year & 1 Month Interest on his Bond for $4000 to same to date | 303.33 |
| | 10 | " paid his order to Wm. C. Danner & Co. | 104.26 |
| May | 5 | " paid his order to O. P. Law, Tax Collector | 95.56 |
| | | | $2,902.40 |
| | | To Balance brought down at your debit this day | $ 903.55 |

E. E.

Charleston 10th June 1857
Coffin & Pringle
for John P. Matheson

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248.

Without his factor, however, the planter would have been hard put to it to operate his plantation. The factor often held the planter's cotton in storage waiting higher prices, paying storage and insurance, which, of course, were deducted from the sale of the cotton. Sea-island cotton was usually later in reaching the market than the short-staple cotton because of the longer time required in ginning it. It did not begin to move freely into market until the first of the year, but some planters had their factors hold their cotton as late as July and August.

It usually cost the planter about 4 per cent of the value of the bale to market his cotton after it had been ginned. For instance, in June, 1835, Miss Mary B. Elliott, daughter of William Elliott, the first successful planter of sea-island cotton in South Carolina, sold ten bales of prime cotton from her plantation "The Battery"[48] for $1,258.65, the freight, storage and factor's commission of which were $48.64, or 4 per cent of the receipts.[49] In July it cost her 4.6 per cent of the receipts to market five bales of stained cotton and two bales "a shade better." In June, 1840, she was paying 4.1 per cent for freight, storage, and commission. In 1859 John E. Fripp, of St. Helena Island and Bluff plantation on the Oakatee, was paying 4.1 per cent.[50] Freight ordinarily cost $1 a bale; landing, weighing, and storage about 26 cents a bale; insurance, about 37 cents a bale, and the factor's commission 2½ per cent of the sale price.[51] Planters on St. Helena Island ordinarily

[48] The town of Port Royal was built on this plantation during the Civil War.
[49] Miss Mary B. Elliott Account Book, 1835-1849.
[50] John E. Fripp Papers.
[51] Based upon statements which Coffin & Pringle, factors, made to John E. Fripp, in Fripp Papers.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



248 sent their cotton to Beaufort by their own sail boats which were loaded at the plantation docks. At Beaufort they put the cotton, which they billed to their factor, on a boat for Charleston, paying the usual $1 a bale for freight.

The price paid for sea-island cotton varied with the yield and demand for the staple throughout the ante-bellum period, as did that of upland cotton. Between 1806 and 1816 the price varied from 25 cents to 47 cents a pound.[52] At this time, sea-island cotton was not graded, as William Elliott pointed out in 1828,[53] but sold generally as either fine or inferior. The account book of Miss Mary B. Elliott, his sister, in which she recorded her sales between 1830 and 1849 indicates that she sold during this time four grades of cotton: extra fine, prime, inferior white, and stained or yellow.[54] The price which she received for prime cotton varied from 21 cents in 1843 to 62½ cents in 1836. The inferior white brought 4 or 5 cents a pound less than the prime cotton and the extra fine about that much more. The stained cotton sold usually from 7 to 9 cents a pound.

A sea-island cotton planter of Liberty County, Georgia, analyzed his cotton crops from 1830 to 1847 and found that the average price he received a pound in the eighteen years varied from 13½ cents in 1842 to 41 cents in 1838.[55] At the same time his yield per acre varied from 68 pounds in 1846, when he received net proceeds of $41 a hand, to 223 pounds an acre in 1842, when he

[52] *DeBow's Review*, IV, 412.

[53] *Supra*, p. 51.

[54] The classes of long staple cotton on the market were: Floridas, Santees, Maines, and Sea Islands. Each of these was usually classified as common, medium and fine.

[55] Turner, *Cotton Planter's Manual*, pp. 128-129.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



realized $80 a hand. The net proceeds per hand were highest in 1835 at $137 a hand and lowest in 1846 at $41, with an average of $83 for the eighteen years. 248

Miss Mary B. Elliott received over a period of eleven years an average of $87.54 a bale for her sea-island cotton, receiving as high as an average of $183.57 a bale in 1836 and as low as $54.61 in 1848.[56] If it cost an average of $27 a bale to gin the cotton, as Seabrook of Edisto Island estimated,[57] and 4 per cent of the receipts to market it, then the planter had $57.04 a bale out of which to care for his slaves, pay the general overhead on his plantation, and realize interest on the investment of his capital.

[56] Elliott Account Book, 1835-1849.
[57] *Supra*, p. 30.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



The basis of work on a sea-island cotton plantation was the task. In time the term came to signify a quarter of an acre laid out 105 by 105 feet. The acre was laid out square, 210 by 210 feet. A day's work for a full hand depended upon the time of year and the kind of work he was doing. When listing, the full hand's task was a quarter of an acre. Listing was the first process of preparing the land for cotton after the field had been manured, and consisted of hoeing the grass off the old bed into the alleys. Next the old beds were hauled on top at the rate of a quarter of an acre a day to the full hand. When a plow was used, as it seldom was, the hands followed with hoes, finishing off the beds at the rate of three tasks a day, or three-fourths of an acre. A plowman's allotment was usually four tasks, or an acre a day.

When the bed had been made, two hands made holes the width of the hoe cross-wise on the top of it at intervals of about eighteen inches. Another hand followed, scattering ten or fifteen seeds in each hole, while two other hands covered them to a depth of about an inch and a half, patting the soil down. Since this was light work the day's assignment in this process was usually three tasks.

A day's work at hoeing after the cotton came up was ordinarily two tasks. Picking, which was done generally by the women and children, was accomplished at the rate of about ninety to a hundred pounds a day for a full hand. The task at assorting was from thirty to fifty pounds of seed cotton a day, at ginning from twenty to thirty pounds a day, at moting from thirty to fifty pounds a day.

The tasks involved in plantation work as laid down

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



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S. Philbrick, a prosperous engineer and architect who had left his home in Brookline, Massachusetts, to serve without remuneration in this social experiment, contributing himself $1,000 to the cause.[22] The superintendents generally had five or six plantations in charge, and, sometimes, with the assistance of a teacher, had as many as 500 Negroes to supervise. The superintendents found their laborers in need of clothes and implements, for the battle of Port Royal had occurred a few weeks before the customary time to issue winter clothes, and hoes were never given out until February. Moreover, the planting season had already advanced six weeks before the superintendents assumed charge of their respective plantations. In addition to these handicaps, they had to learn something about the methods of agriculture which they were supposed to oversee.

In every case the superintendent found it necessary to lean heavily upon the plantation driver for information and assistance and to follow the system of plantation management already established by the former owners. The driver was instructed to go about his accustomed work, stake off each hand's task as before, and manage the details of planting. The Negroes had already begun putting their own patches into corn, but they were reluctant to plant cotton, and it took much artful persuasion to induce them to do so. Thus, while the provision crop on St. Helena for 1862 was about the same as in ante-bellum times, the cotton crop fell far short. The cotton crops from both St. Helena and Ladies islands amounted to only $40,000.[23]

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[22] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 181. [23] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



ever that some scheme of management be hit upon which would make the plantations pay for themselves, for Congress showed no disposition to help the experiment along by an appropriation and the cotton fund, the amount realized from the sale of the crop of 1861, was getting low.[30]

Early in November General Saxton called a meeting of superintendents to consider plans for the coming year. Edward S. Philbrick, superintendent of Coffin's Point plantation, advocated an almost complete overthrow of the old plantation system. He would divide the plantations among the people, allotting the Negro families as much land as they could cultivate, paying them upon the basis of what they raised. This plan the government finally accepted for the crop of 1863. The plantations still under Government supervision were divided into plots and rented without charge to the plantation families, the land being apportioned at the rate of two acres for every working hand and five-sixteenths of an acre for every child. If they refused to raise cotton, they were compelled to pay a rent of not more than $2 a month. In addition, the Government supplied the implements and seeds and paid 25 cents for a day's work, usually the amount of work performed by task under the master.[31]

Saxton now divided the territory under his supervision into three areas and appointed a general superintendent over each. The local superintendents in charge of plantations were answerable to their respective general superintendents.[32]

[30] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 115.

[31] Pierce, *Addresses and Papers*, p. 116. Pierce had approved of this plan in his "Second Report," p. 319.

[32] *Official Records*, ser. III, vol. IV, serial 125, pp. 1023, 1024.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



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tricts." Arthur Sumner who had been the teacher for Chisolm's plantation on St. Helena Island since 1862 outlined in a letter to a friend some of the difficulties of planting under the system arising out of the sale of plantations:

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I think I have not told you that I have become a cotton-planter—or, as we style each other a speculator? I have been forced to this, most reluctantly, by the fact that this plantation has been made one of the School Farms. . . . If I did not lease the farm, it would be given to some one else, who might choose to remove me and employ some one else as the teacher of my school. And besides, the privileges which Government has hitherto allowed the teachers, and which are equivalent to a much larger sum of money than our salaries amount to, will probably be withdrawn before long so that I am obliged to make some money in order to support myself. I have therefore been obliged to borrow capital at the North, and before the crop is matured shall have to get a good deal more. The expenses are very large—including the purchase of mules, carts, grain, and before long, horses, furniture, cow harness, plows & so on. Carpentering, too, is to be no small item. And when the aforesaid privileges are disallowed, my expenses will reach a formidable figure. Add to this, that the young man who has undertaken to manage the farm for me, is to have one third of the profits, and there will remain to me after the sale of the crop no more than $1200 or $1500 net profit, with which to begin the ensuing year.[35]

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The Government thus gave up the paternalistic idea of government-operated plantations and was content until the passage of the Freedman's Bureau Act[36] in 1865, to exercise only a general supervision over the Negro, permitting someone else, into whose qualifications it did not

[35] MS in Sumner Papers. St. Helena Island, March 1, 1864.
[36] *U. S. Statutes at Large*, XIII, 507-509.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

CHAPTER IX

# THE AFTERMATH

## A ST. HELENA PICTURE IN 1865

IT WAS SUNDAY in May, 1865. The sandy road, covered in the low places with a top dressing of oyster shells, led off among the cotton fields down the Island. On either side were sagging wire fences, reminders of plantation boundaries before the war, the wire sometimes propped by drooping posts, at other times deeply embedded in the trunks of fine trees forming magnificent avenues.

Here and there were small frame houses, with narrow porches and four or five rooms, the residences of former overseers. Rude pine-log cabins, newly built, and clapboarded shanties leaning crazily in the mid-day sun dotted the fields. Gardens of growing vegetables separated the cabins from the rows of cotton that extended away as far as one could see. Little stakes occasionally marked off private holdings, sometimes the only boundaries in fields of a hundred or more acres of cotton. Just beyond was a large tract lying fallow, covered with a luxurious growth of cassina and dewberries, or perhaps a young forest of pines had sprung up among cotton furrows which, though idle for many years, were yet plainly visible.

The cotton was small, for it was not more than four weeks out of the ground, but the corn was knee high. Neat ridges were already piled up about the cabins waiting until the young sweet potato slips were large enough for transplanting. Here the fields were beautifully clean, carefully hilled up with the hoe by the women and old

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11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



men, for the young men were still away in the army or at work in the camps for "cash money." Across the road the cotton was scarcely up, struggling bravely against wild phlox and grass, a picturesque battle bearing witness that the owner would beg for Government rations in the winter and perhaps stand by and see his land sold for taxes a few years later.

The freedmen, some of them now making their second crop on their own little "plantations," were on their way to "Brick Church" to hear "old Massa Richard,"[1] who had preached to them before "big gun shoot," speak in the open under the moss-hung live oaks. They crowded the road, a gaily-dressed throng of black folk, some on foot, some on horseback, some in wagons, others in the rude ox cart of plantation days, some even in northern trotting buggies drawn by Government-condemned horses which the proud owners had bought for perhaps as much as $300 cash. They were a colorful sight in their gaudy calicoes and crinolines. The younger women wore straw bonnets, stays, and cotton gloves, but the grannies clung to their many-colored handkerchiefs and their loose gowns cut after the fashion of slavery days.

Their loud laughter and gay chatter rang out as they passed through the gates which in plantation days had made a private road to the church. As a buggy containing a group of white teachers and superintendents approached, those on foot stopped and drew aside, out of respect, to let the vehicle pass. The old women gave the white party a droll bob of the head, the young ones made

[1] The Reverend Richard Fuller, former pastor of "Brick Church" and owner of a plantation on St. Helena Island.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



a house and fuel and all the land for their own use that they chose to cultivate, usually three or four acres. Upon the corn land, however, they paid a rent of a bushel to the acre and usually supplied all the sweet potatoes needed by the white family. But the planter also paid his laborers a money wage of about $15 an acre for listing, planting, and hoeing the cotton crop and 2½ cents a pound for picking it. The withdrawal of the army and a succession of crop failures were going, however, in a few years to change the situation.

### THE STARVING TIME

The only good crop of sea-island cotton grown during the Federal occupation was that of 1863. After the war, sea-island cotton planters faced a series of failures and the freedmen began to feel the pinch of hard times. "The negroes' crops did not turn out very well, as a general rule," wrote Charles Ware from St. Helena in 1865, "want of manure and careless working being the principal causes; the caterpillar did a great deal of damage."[12] The crops of 1866, 1867, 1868, were likewise failures, and at the same time the price of cotton dropped. These conditions drove several of the northern planters from St. Helena; and, for the first time, large tracts of land lay idle. Miss Towne who had bought a part of Frogmore plantation wrote in 1868, "I don't believe a white man would run the place for love or what money he could make, because there are so few white men, and so much unleased land."[13]

Planters everywhere in the coastal region were laboring against great odds. Factors in Charleston and Savan-

[12] *Letters from Port Royal*, pp. 297, 298. [13] *Letters and Diary*, p. 189.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



nah, who were trying to carry on their business as before the war, had but little money with which to do so, but they lent and borrowed to the limit, taking great risks and demanding high percentages. Northern capital in many instances came to the rescue both of factors and planters. But the series of crop failures coupled with the drop in the price of cotton and the continued high price of provisions brought disaster to all. Frequently planters deeded large tracts of land, sometimes all except a hundred or more acres of what was once a large plantation, to northern firms for the cancellation of debts. James Gregorie, of Greenwood plantation, located not far from Beaufort, after making a tragic struggle for ten years to carry on his planting, finally gave up his property to a Philadelphia firm which he had involved heavily in debt.[14] In many instances these northern houses, after holding the plantations for a few years, began to sell them in small plots to Negroes, thus giving rise to the numerous communities of Negro landowners, aside from those in old Beaufort District, which now dot the coast of South Carolina and Georgia.

The Government offered relief by issuing rations to the freedmen, now hard-pressed. Later when the Freedmen's Bureau had been abandoned and the Negroes could no longer turn to the Government for aid, Miss Towne came forward with provisions, supplied sometimes from her own funds, at other times by gifts from the North which she had solicited. In 1876 when there was considerable distress, the whites of Beaufort organized a society to obtain funds with which to issue provisions.

[14] See MSS in Gregorie Papers.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island



175 657 735 William Elliott, one of several natives who had returned to Beaufort to live, was appointed to look after the needy in Beaufort and on the islands. In this way, the Negroes were able to face "the starving times."

175 • 248 If the profits from the cultivation of sea-island cotton were low in ante-bellum days, they were far less during the uncertain days of reconstruction. While some Negro landowners worked their cotton well, fertilizing the land and hoeing the crops regularly, still others were careless and indifferent. As a rule the cotton grown after slavery was of a coarser quality than that produced by ante-bellum planters. The fine seed, the result of many years of selection, had deteriorated. In fact, much of it was lost when the crop of 1861 was ginned at the North. Nor did the Negroes take pains to manure their fields. Gathering marsh grass and mud were disagreeable tasks which most of them preferred to avoid. The Negro landowners were further handicapped by the fact that they had to sell their cotton in the seed to the island stores and could not hold it for higher prices. A correspondent for *Harper's Monthly*, [244] S. G. W. Benjamin, who visited St. Helena Island in 1878, found most of the Negroes growing vegetables and [434] only a small quantity of cotton. Nevertheless, cotton remained the Islanders' only money crop. When, therefore, the boll weevil destroyed the production of sea-island cotton in 1918, the Negro landowners of St. Helena were confronted with an economic readjustment as radical as their fathers had faced after slavery.

175 511 735 After the inflation of war times, the Negroes of St. Helena quite generally settled down to an economic regime of self-sufficiency. They raised sweet potatoes and